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ABSTRACT

In a study of children's donating behavior, the effects of experimenter instructions, perceived maternal discipline, and self-instructive cognitions were investigated. Seventy-two second; third; and fourth-grade girls who viewed their mothers as inductive or power assertive earned tokens in a size-judgement task. They observed a model donate and received directive or permissive instructions and self-instructive cognitions which supported, challenged, or were unrelated to donating. Directive instructions produced the greatest incidence of donating among the subjects, and greater imitation of the modeled standard. Results are discussed in terms of the strong influence of directive instructions and interaction of these with age and perceived discipline variables. (Author/MP)

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Effects of Instructions, Self-Instructions and Discipline on Children's Donating

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Abstract

In a study of children's donating, the effects of experimenter instructions, perceived maternal discipline, and self-instructive cognitions were investigated. Seventy-two second, third, and fourth grade girls who viewed their mothers as inductive or power assertive earned tokens in a size-judgement task. They observed a model donate and received directive or permissive instructions and self-instructive cognitions which supported, challenged, or were unrelated to donating. Directive instructions produced greater donation, more girls donating, and greater imitation of the modeled standard. Results are discussed in terms of the strong influence of directive instructions and interaction of these with age and perceived discipline variables.

Effects of Instructions, Self-Instructions and Discipline on Children's Donating

Children's development of prosocial behavior has been widely investigated (Bryan, 1975; Hoffman, 1979), but studies frequently neglect person variables as they interact with settings. One vitally important person variable is the parental discipline style to which children are repeatedly exposed. Research indicates that links between children's positive social behavior and parental discipline are stronger for inductive than for power assertive discipline techniques (Hoffman, 1975). Furthermore, setting variables such as the instructions children receive affect their prosocial behavior (Israel and Brown, 1979; White, 1972). The present study was designed to examine a person variable (children's perception of maternal discipline) as it related to two environmental factors (differences in experimenter instructions and self-instructive cognitions).

One prosocial behavior, donating, has been shown to reflect the degree to which setting information suggests that such behavior is appropriate or expected (Poulos and Liebert, 1972). Thus, in the present investigation the two setting variables were expected to affect donating, such that levels offering more supporting cues would produce greater donating. Consistent with previous findings, inductive maternal discipline was expected to produce greater donating than power assertive discipline. Differences between discipline and cognition variables were expected to be masked by directive instructions, but evident under permissive instructions.

Subjects

Seventy-two second, third, and fourth grade girls attending two middle-class public elementary schools were screened. They were assigned to an Inductive or Power Assertive Discipline Condition if they scored in the top half of either of the appropriate socialization scales (Dlugokinski and Firestone, 1974; Hoffman and Saltstein, 1967).

Procedure

The socialization scales were individually administered by a male undergraduate, in a mobile laboratory. Approximately one week later, selected girls returned individually and met the experimenter and the female confederate-model, who reportedly had completed a size-discrimination task for tokens. The experimenter explained the task to each girl who then earned eight tokens to exchange for a prize later. The more tokens exchanged, the better her prize would be. The girl watched the experimenter instruct the model and saw the model donate four tokens, saying that giving was desirable and suggesting a standard of four tokens. The model then left, and the girl received the same instructions.

Directive vs. permissive instructions. All girls were told that children at another school would receive prizes if enough tokens were donated. Half heard instructions which required that they donate (directive) while half received instructions making donating optional (permissive).

Supporting vs. tempting self-instructive cognitions. One-third of the children in each of the instructional conditions learned sentences supporting donating. Those girls repeated several sentences indicating that it would feel good to give to others. A second third learned tempting self-

instructive sentences which emphasized self-gratification. The final third learned sentences unrelating to donating.

Results

Table 1 presents the mean number of tokens donated, the number of children donating and the number of children giving exactly four tokens. The effects of the independent variables on the amount donated were assessed by a 2 (Instructions) X2 (Discipline) X3 (Cognition) X3 (Grade) analysis of variance. Directive instructions produced more donating than permissive instructions ($F(1,36) = 21.76$, $p < .01$) and a significant effect of grade level was obtained ($F(2,36) = 4.17$, $p < .05$), such that third and fourth grade girls gave more than second grade girls ($t(36) = 2.39$, $p < .025$).

Directive instructions led to donating by significantly more children than permissive instructions ($X^2(1) = 9.40$, $p < .01$). The interaction of instructions and discipline style indicated that whereas significantly more power assertive girls gave under directive instructions ($X^2(1) = 5.00$, $p < .05$), the difference for inductive girls was not significant. Examination of the relationship between instructions and grade indicated that more second graders gave under directive instructions than under permissive instructions ($X^2(1) = 5.56$, $p < .02$). No other significant effects were obtained.

Twenty-six children (36%) imitated the modeled standard. Girls receiving directive instructions imitated the modeled standard more frequently ($X^2(1) = 10.17$, $p < .01$). Inductive children gave four tokens significantly more often under directive instructions than under permissive

instructions ($X^2(1) = 5.72$, $p < .02$); however, there was no difference for power assertive girls. Under directive instructions, second grade girls gave four significantly more often ($X^2(1) = 5.00$, $p < .05$). This difference was not significant for either third or fourth grade girls. No other significant effects were obtained.

Conclusions

Directive instructions led to increased donating on all dependent measures, thus providing additional evidence that directive instructions are a potent elicitor of children's donating in the absence of a socializing agent.

The main effect of grade for amount donated replicates the positive relationship found between age and donating (Bryan and London, 1970), and suggests a transition between grades two and three. This transition may be most parsimoniously interpreted as reflecting children's increasing experience with the desired behavior.

Overall, the perceived discipline variable was not significantly related to girls' donating, contrary to other findings (Dlugokinski and Firestone, 1974). However, the differential effect of instructions on inductive and power assertive girls supports previous work (Hoffman, 1963; Dlugokinski and Firestone, 1974).

Although self-instructive cognitions failed to influence donating, it would be premature to conclude that such procedures have no influence. In general, the results suggest that high instructional cueing has an impact on subsequent donating, thus emphasizing the importance of informational cues as determinants of behavior.

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Table 1

Donating Behavior

Group	Directive			Permissive		
	Supporting	Tempting	Neutral	Supporting	Tempting	Neutral
Mean Number of Tokens Donated						
Power Assertive						
Grade 2	4	3.5	2	0	1	1
Grade 3	4	2.5	4	2.5	2.5	2.5
Grade 4	3.5	3.5	4	4	2.5	2
Inductive						
Grade 2	3.5	3	3.5	1.5	1.5	1
Grade 3	4.5	3	4	2.5	2.5	2.5
Grade 4	3.5	4	4	1.5	2.5	3
Number of Children Donating						
Power Assertive						
Grade 2	2	2	2	0	1	1
Grade 3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Grade 4	2	2	2	2	1	1
Inductive						
Grade 2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Grade 3	2	2	2	2	2	1
Grade 4	2	2	2	1	2	2
Number of Children Donating Exactly Four						
Power Assertive						
Grade 2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Grade 3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 4	1	1	2	2	0	1
Inductive						
Grade 2	1	1	1	0	0	0
Grade 3	1	0	2	1	1	0
Grade 4	1	2	2	0	0	1